

*Great Civilisations*



# *The VIKINGS*







GREENLAND  
ATLANTIC OCEAN

ICELAND

NORWAY

SWEDEN

SHETLANDS

ORKNEYS

IONA

LINDISFARNE

IRELAND

DANELAW

ENGLAND

LONDON

Seine

NORMANDY

FRANCE

Loire

GERMANY

Rhine

Oder

Elbe

BALTIC SEA

Vistula

NOVGOROD

W. Dvina

N



ITALY

MEDITERRANEAN

NORTH AFRICA



# Where the Vikings went







A Ladybird Book  
Series 561

*This is the story of the Vikings, a word which conjures up pictures of fast exciting ships and a race of fierce, proud seamen. They reached the limits of the known world in their beautiful ships, for difficulties meant nothing to them. They were welcomed as traders wherever they went, but the sight of their fighting ships, come to pillage and plunder, caused people to flee in terror.*

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*Great Civilisations*  
***The***  
***VIKINGS***

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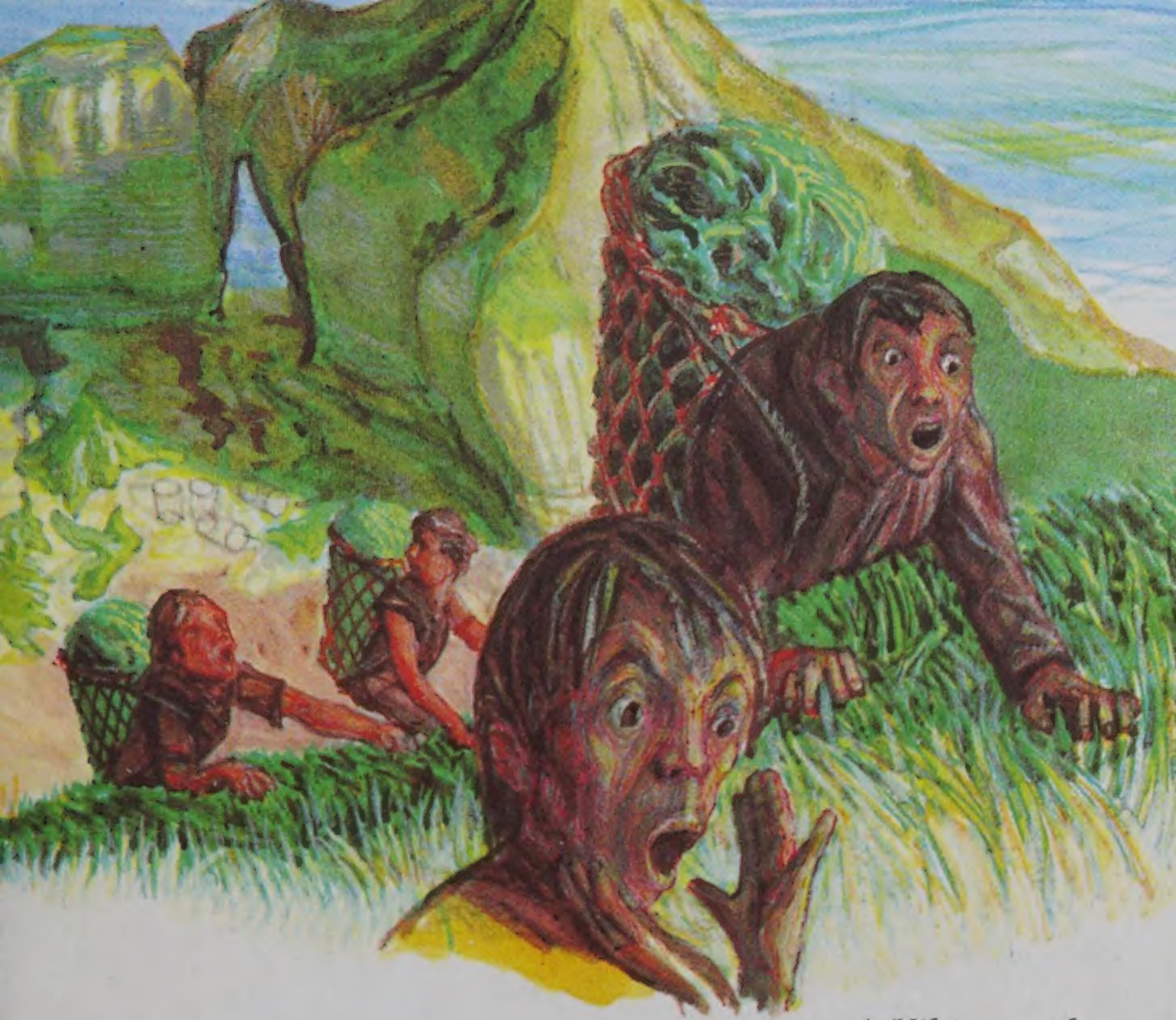




## I. The Viking Raiders

If you had lived ten or eleven centuries ago in a village along the coasts of northern Europe, the most terrifying thing in your life would have been the sight of a large square sail on the horizon. Just imagine you are standing on a beach or cliff top watching that sail. You cannot take your eyes off it; as you watch, the long slim warship beneath the sail comes into view. Perhaps the sunlight is making bright sparks flash off the shields that line the sides of the ship. By the time you can see the fierce-faced warriors sitting in the ship with their spears, swords and axes, you are running back to your village as fast as you can with the terrible news that Viking raiders are approaching.





### *A Viking raid*

At once, the village seems to be full of screaming people running about in terror. Women snatch up their children and try to hide. The men grab their weapons and rush to the beach in the hope of repulsing the raiders.

All of them know only too well what is going to happen in the next half hour or so. All of them have heard horrifying stories of Viking raiders charging wildly through settlements and villages, killing everyone in their way, stealing everything they can find, setting fire to huts, kidnapping slaves and leaving behind terrible destruction and sorrow.



It is not really surprising that between the 8th and 11th centuries A D, the time when violent attacks by the Vikings were taking place in Europe, the victims looked on the Vikings as merciless savages and blood-thirsty murderers. Churchmen and priests constantly proclaimed that, with the Viking raids, a frightening Bible prophecy had come true.

The prophet Jeremiah had predicted in the Book of Jeremiah, 'Out of the North an evil shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land.'

*Attacking a village*





The 'North', in this case the Scandinavian lands of northern Europe, was the part of the continent the Vikings inhabited. Of course, the victims of the Viking raids knew nothing about Scandinavia; they just wished the Vikings would stay at home and leave them alone. Had it been possible for them to see where and how the Vikings lived they might, perhaps, have understood why they were such fierce people, why they loved fighting and war so much and why they were so energetic and adventurous. The type of country people inhabit and the sort of life they live there, often have a great effect on the sort of people they are.





Viking Scandinavia was not the place for weaklings or cowards or for anyone who was lazy or idle. It was a very harsh and bleak land. Scandinavian winters were freezing cold and very gloomy. For days, sometimes weeks on end, the sun never shone. The soil of Scandinavia was not very fertile, so Viking farmers had to work extremely hard to raise their crops of barley, oats, flax, rye and vegetables. For the same reason Viking shepherds did not have an easy time finding good grazing land for their flocks of cattle, sheep and goats. The icy waters surrounding Scandinavia were just as unfriendly as the land. So you had to be very tough to survive in a land like Scandinavia, because it could be

### *Farming*





quite a dangerous business just to provide for your ordinary everyday needs.

In order to obtain meat and also the hides and furs from which they made their clothes, the Vikings used to hunt reindeer, elk, red deer, and other animals such as wild bears. Hunting was just as hazardous for the fishermen when they harpooned huge whales or chased them into inlets, where they killed them; one heave of a whale's back or one flick of its enormous tail could easily wreck a fishing boat. Whales were not the only sea creatures the Viking fishermen hunted, of course. They also fished for cod, salmon, trout, seals, and walrus, and caught sea birds like puffins and guillemots.





Seal-skins, bear-furs and the furs of other creatures like red fox, ermine, beaver and lynx provided the Vikings with the clothes they needed. These skins and furs made very warm cloaks, tunics, boots and hoods to protect the Vikings against the bitter cold of winter-time. The oil the Vikings obtained from whales and other creatures was used as fuel for lamps, and reindeer antlers and walrus tusks were used to make combs, or knife-handles or spindle-whorls.

Spindle-whorls were important tools for the Vikings. They were used by Viking women to twist and wind the thread that went to make clothes and blankets, lace and tapestries. Viking women, like Viking men, worked very hard, particularly in the kitchen. These women had no labour-saving devices or machines to help them in their work, as housewives have today. When they made a soup or a stew, for instance, they had to stand for a long time stirring liquids in huge steaming cauldrons. Roasting meat meant turning it by hand on spits which were erected over large fires. The women used to grind grain in stone *querns* (handmills) and then bake it into loaves on large pans. Butter and cheese were made by churning cow's or goat's milk, and if Viking women wanted salt they had to make it by boiling seaweed or sea-water.

Salt was important, because the women used it to preserve the fish, meat, butter and cheese they needed to feed their families during the winter. Food was also preserved with home-grown spices like juniper berries, cummin and mustard, as well as with pepper and other spices which Viking traders imported from Asia.

*Preparing a meal*







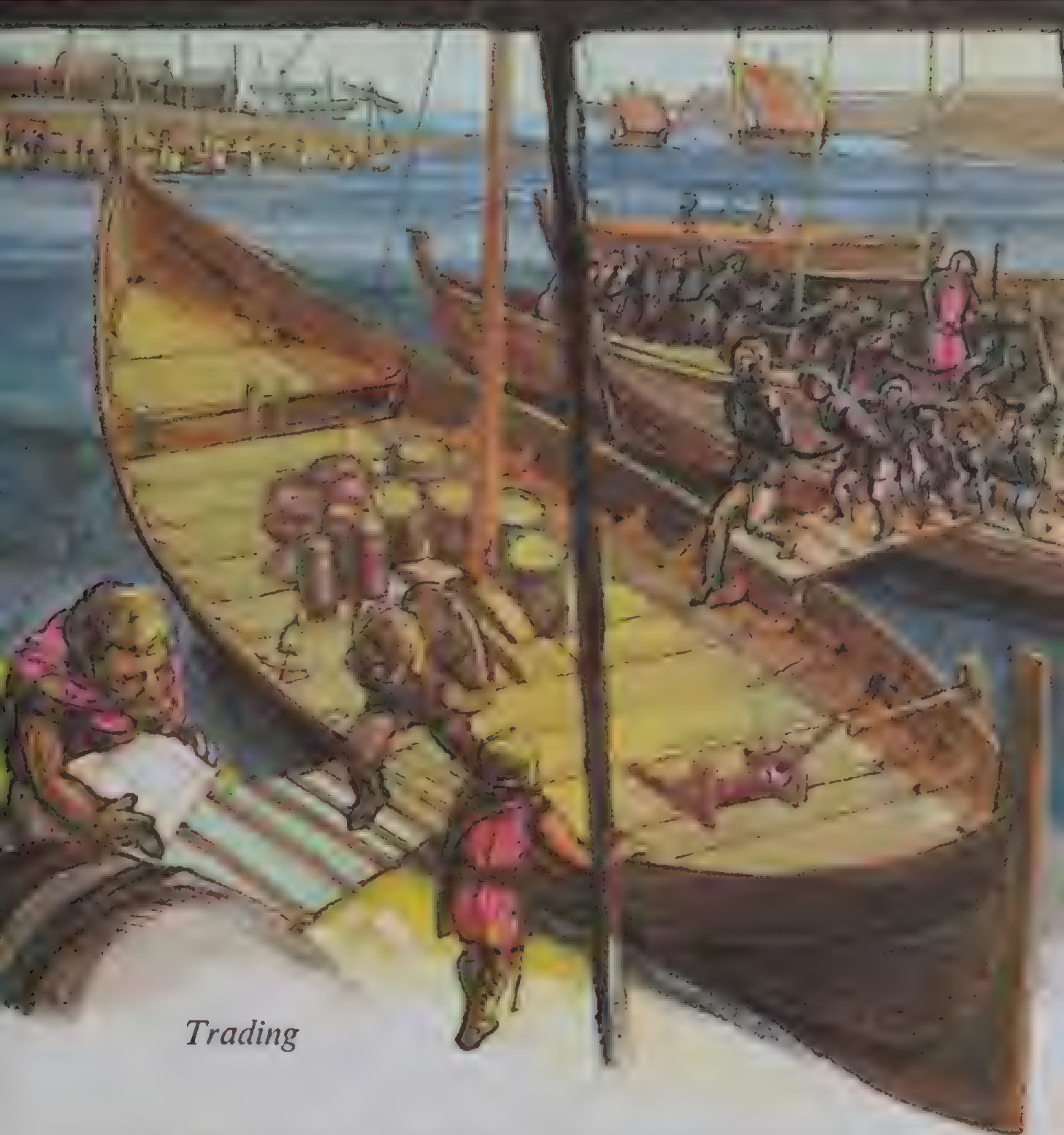


Although Viking raiders were feared, their merchants were welcomed as far from home as the Caspian and the Black Sea. No one in a foreign port became terrified when they saw a Viking *knorr* ship sailing in towards the shore.

Many merchants travelled overland on horseback, too, or in horse-drawn carts. In winter they carried their goods on sledges.

Unlike the long, slim Viking warships in which the much-feared raiders travelled, *knorr* cargo vessels with their wide beams and heavy timbers meant the





*Trading*

arrival of exciting luxuries. The Vikings had come to trade, not raid.

In Russia, Viking merchants traded furs, slaves, and leather for silver coins, silk, spices, jewellery and wine. In Europe they traded furs, dried fish, bird feathers, sealskin ropes and other items for European pottery, glassware, slaves, sword blades, linens and jewellery. Because of the rich trading, pirates became a continual hazard to the peaceful merchant ships.



The Viking traders often took back to Scandinavia such luxury items as gold and silver objects and coins, jewellery, ornaments, silks and large quantities of strong foreign wine. These foreign goods were very popular with the Vikings at home, because they loved wearing fine garments, brilliantly-coloured cloth and beautiful jewellery. Viking artists made many lovely ornaments themselves; they fashioned armlets and pendants and bracelets, as well as decorated picture-stones, tapestries and carvings. Luxuries of this kind, whether they were home-made or imported from abroad, helped brighten up everyday life for the Vikings. Although their homeland was bleak and harsh, they were not a gloomy people, and got tremendous enjoyment out of dressing themselves up in their best clothes and ornaments and going to parties and banquets.

The great long halls in which banquets took place often had embroidered tapestries and hangings on the wooden walls. Long trestle tables were loaded with metal bowls and knives, drinking horns, rectangular-shaped platters, spoons made from horn or wood, and, of course, enormous quantities of food and drink.

The Vikings enjoyed these banquets and spent hours noisily feasting, drinking, gossiping, swopping jokes and telling stories. They ate large amounts of soup, porridge, cheese, fruit, bread and several different kinds of meat and fish, all at one meal. In addition, they drank cup after cup of mead, beer and imported wine and as a result could get very drunk and very boisterous.

### *Enjoying a banquet*









### *Snow sports*

After the banquet was over, there were many kinds of entertainments for the Vikings to enjoy. They might sit down in a corner and play games of dice or draughts or chess. Or they might loll back in their chairs and make up poems and rhymes or set puzzles and riddles for their friends to solve. There was singing and dancing and juggling, tumbling and wrestling. Clowns and acrobats, too, were always popular as after-dinner entertainers.

The Vikings liked outdoor entertainment, as well. They had snowball fights, and loved skating, ski-ing and sledging. Sometimes they had horse-fighting, and they enjoyed bareback riding.

### *Wrestling*







Best of all, however, they liked to listen to the poets and storytellers with their stirring sagas of bravery and adventure.

As you can imagine, the Vikings liked their stories to have brave, strong heroes who triumphed over great danger and performed fearless deeds. Some of these heroes were real-life Vikings like Earl Haakon the Great who conquered Norway in the 10th century A D or Erik the Red, who founded the Viking colony in Greenland. Very often though the characters in Viking sagas were the mighty Viking gods, who were able to perform all sorts of fantastic feats and work wonderful pieces of magic and sorcery.

### *Horse-fighting*





The chief of their gods was the one-eyed Odin or Woden, who sat in Valhalla, the hall of the slain, where the spirits of the bravest Viking warriors lived.

Another of the Viking gods was Thor, the thunder-god, who possessed fantastic physical strength and was always using it to wage war on a race of giant demons.

Naturally enough, the Vikings wanted to make themselves as much like these fierce, fearless gods as possible. So they wore talismans, or small idols of their favourite gods, hung from chains round their necks, or from their belts. The Vikings believed that these talismans could give them the sort of courage, strength and adventurousness which their gods possessed.

In this, of course, the Vikings were being superstitious. Viking superstitions took many forms. For instance, when Viking doctors bandaged wounds or set broken bones, they would recite certain 'magic verses'. Even after the Vikings became Christians after the 9th century A D, doctors used to burn wounds clean with red-hot irons made in the shape of a Cross; the Cross, to them, was not only the sign of their new religion, but a magic mark that would ensure the success of their medical treatments.

There was even a strong touch of superstition about some of the ways Viking judges dispensed justice in the law courts. When a Viking made an oath, he would often cut himself with a knife and sprinkle a few drops of his blood on his armlet: this was supposed to show that any statement he made in court was true.

*Here a poet tells stories of the gods: Thor with his hammer, Odin with his eight-legged horse, and Frey, the god of nature*









The punishments imposed by Viking courts were harsh. Thieves were hanged, witches were stoned to death or drowned, and criminals had their heads cut off.

A Viking anxious to prove his innocence might undergo an agonising ordeal like carrying a piece of red-hot iron a certain distance or throwing it into a trough. The Vikings called this ordeal 'jarnburor'. 'Ketiltak', or 'cauldron taking' was the female ordeal, where a woman had to pick up stones from the bottom of a cauldron of boiling water.

'Jarnburor' and 'ketiltak' caused very painful injuries to the hands which were then bandaged. Some days later, the bandages were removed and the wounds were shown to a priest.







If the priest saw that the wounds had begun to heal, this meant that the man or woman was innocent. If, however, the burns or scalds had become infected then the man or woman was guilty.

It would be unfair, though, to suppose that the Vikings relied on superstition to decide everything in their courts of law. Many of their laws were sensible, just and often merciful. For example, if one Viking wounded another in a fight, he had to pay the doctor who came to tend the injured man.

This sort of situation arose fairly frequently because, as you know, the Vikings were a very fierce and warlike people. The followers of two rival Viking chiefs might, for instance, fight a 'blood feud'.





These blood feuds, which could be very vicious, might be settled by the rivals going to the law court or to the Thing, the public gathering of free men. Or two men involved in a feud might fight a duel. The Vikings laid down very strict rules for duelling. In Iceland, duelling was called 'holmganga' or 'island-going'. The two men who were to fight took a boat to a small isolated islet where a 'duelling ring' rather like a modern boxing ring was marked out on a piece of flat ground. A large square of cloth was laid down and pegged into the earth at the corners. Posts made of hazelwood were then set up around it, and were joined by ropes.

*A duel*

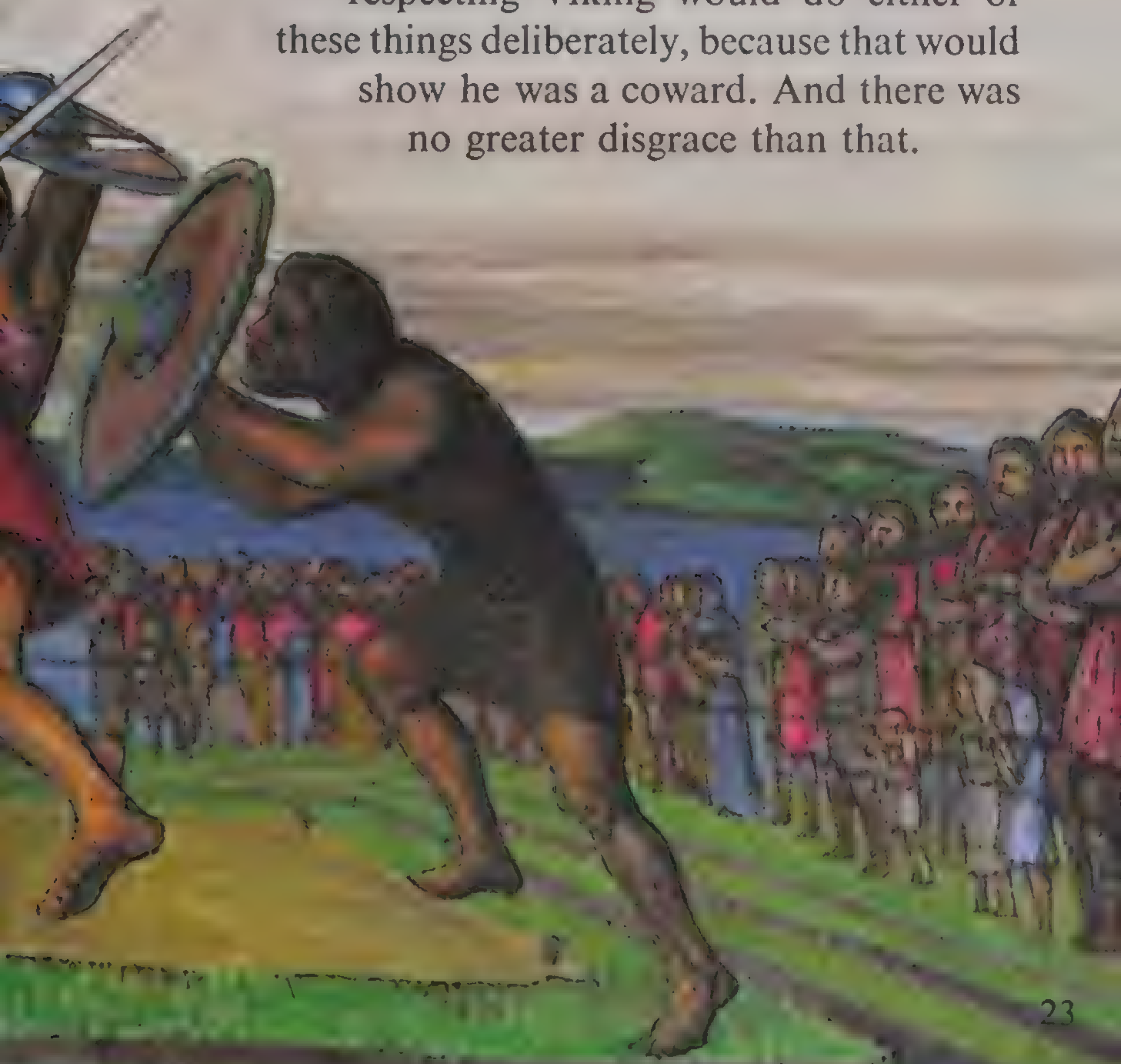




The two fighters, each of them accompanied by a helper or 'second', would get into the ring and take turns to strike at each other with swords. The man being struck was protected by a shield which his 'second' held up in front of him.

The duel went on until blood was spilled on the cloth square. At that point, the man who was wounded might decide to pay his rival to end the fight then and there. The fight could also finish if one of the duellists went outside the boundary of the ring. If he placed one foot outside, then he was judged to be 'in retreat'. If he placed both feet outside, he was 'running'. Naturally, no self-

respecting Viking would do either of these things deliberately, because that would show he was a coward. And there was no greater disgrace than that.









## II: The Vikings Overseas

For a Viking, one of the most exciting places to be was on the sea. They called the sea 'the happy place' and 'the silver necklace of the Earth', and they loved it so much that many of them wanted to be buried in it after they died: a ship carrying the body of a dead Viking was sometimes set on fire and floated out in a river or fjord, where it sank.

It is not really surprising that a lot of Vikings were happiest when they were at sea, because they were brilliant sailors and doing something you are good at is always extremely enjoyable. After the 7th century A D, when the Vikings started to fit sails to their vessels and began to voyage in the open sea, no one else in Europe could match their seafaring skills. In fact, their extraordinary seamanship played a big part in the great shock-wave of fear the Viking raids caused in Europe. In 793 A D, the Vikings made their first and very destructive raid on the island of Lindisfarne, two miles off the Northumberland coast. When he heard what had happened, Alcuin, a Northumbrian scholar, was amazed as well as horrified. 'It was not thought possible they could have made such a voyage,' he wrote.

The voyage to Lindisfarne was, of course, the voyage from the west coast of Scandinavia across the North Sea to the east coast of England. Poor Alcuin would have been even more startled had he known that this was a simple and straightforward journey for the talented Viking sailors. They could sail their ships much further and through far more dangerous waters, to places like Iceland, Greenland and maybe even to America.

*Raiding Lindisfarne monastery*



The longships in which voyages like this were made were specially built to stand the enormous strains and stresses they would face in the open sea.

The hulls were made of long planks lashed to the 'ribs' or the framework of the ships. Cross-beams ran from one side of the ship to the other and were fastened by wooden angle-joints to the frame. The result was a long, sleek, supple vessel which could move easily with the movement of the waves. The sharply-pointed prow could take the Viking longships slicing through the water

*A Viking shipyard*





at speeds of up to 12 knots, and the strong keel, which was often made from a single piece of wood, helped to keep the ship steady. These keels were often very long, sometimes almost as long as the ships themselves, and the masts the ships carried might be as much as 41 ft (12.5 metres) high. The masts were mounted on stout blocks of wood called *kerling* and hung with a single sail made of *wadmál*, a thick woollen cloth. Sometimes the wadmál was strengthened by a covering made from rope net.





A sturdy, steady ship was, of course, absolutely vital if the Vikings were to make successful voyages. However, success also depended on skilful navigation. It was easy enough for Vikings to navigate along the Scandinavian coast, and up and down the fjords. For these coast-hugging journeys, they used small boats or fast, large, general-purpose vessels called *kuta* or *karfi*. However, sailing in the open sea was much more difficult.

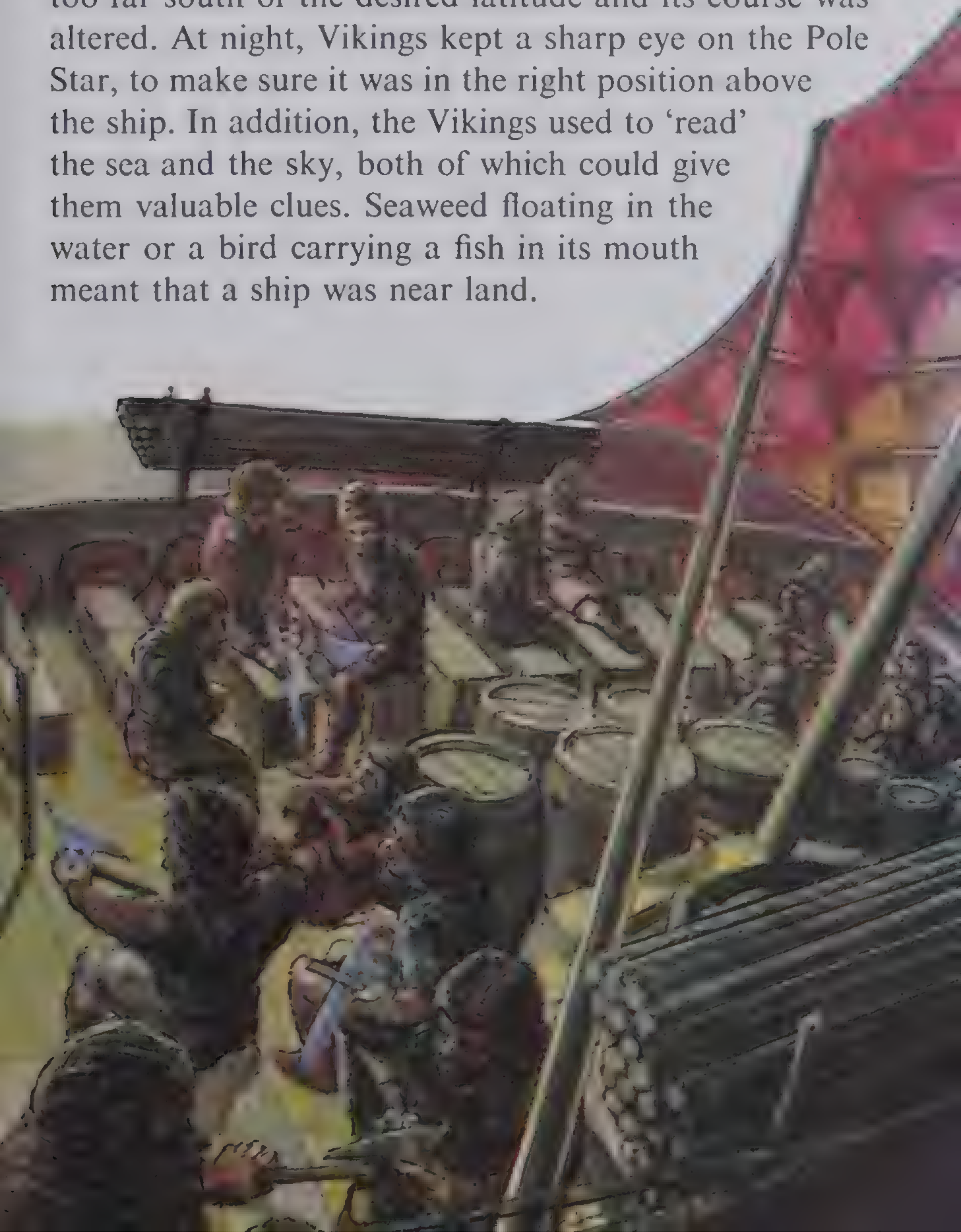
When travelling in the open sea, the Vikings used a method of navigation called *latitude sailing*. This involved sailing north or south until they reached the latitude along which their destination lay, then turning east or west and sailing along or near the latitude until

*The Vikings using a bearing dial to navigate*





they reached it. Viking navigators used the sun by day and the Pole Star by night. In the daytime, when the sun shone, they watched the shadow cast by a long notched stick: if the shadow was not of the proper length, this meant that the ship was too far north or too far south of the desired latitude and its course was altered. At night, Vikings kept a sharp eye on the Pole Star, to make sure it was in the right position above the ship. In addition, the Vikings used to 'read' the sea and the sky, both of which could give them valuable clues. Seaweed floating in the water or a bird carrying a fish in its mouth meant that a ship was near land.





Landmarks were also important, even on open sea voyages. For instance, these were the sailing instructions the Vikings used to sail from Norway to Greenland along latitude 61 degrees North:

‘From Hernar in Norway, sail westwards for Hvarf in Greenland. You will sail north of the Shetland Islands so that you can just see it in very clear weather. You should sail south of the Faroe Islands so that the sea appears halfway up the mountain slopes . . .’

If a Viking navigator failed to sight the Shetland Islands or if he saw the sea was less than halfway up the slopes of the Faroe Islands, then he knew his ship’s course was not the correct one and had to be altered.

The sea is, and always has been, a very dangerous place and despite all their skill and all their courage, many Viking sailors and their ships were lost at sea. Today, there are thousands of wrecks of Viking ships lying on the beds of the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean and the rivers of Russia, France and Germany.

However, the very locations of these wrecks tell us something very admirable about the Viking sailors: they show just how far they ventured from their Scandinavian homeland. In the west, they voyaged along the coasts of France and Spain, through the Strait of Gibraltar and across the Mediterranean to Italy and North Africa. In the east, Viking ships sailed all the way down the great Russian rivers Volkhov, Dnieper and Volga to the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean.

*Many ships and sailors were lost at sea*









In all these places and many more, the Vikings raided settlements, plundered churches, killed hundreds of men, women and children and generally spread death, destruction and terror wherever they went. Churches and monasteries were the Vikings' favourite targets, because here, there were great stores of gold and jewels and precious ornaments. Monasteries were often on small, isolated islands like Lindisfarne or Iona, or they were placed on wild, dangerous coasts, like the monasteries at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth. Here, the builders of the monasteries supposed they would be safe from attack. How wrong they were!

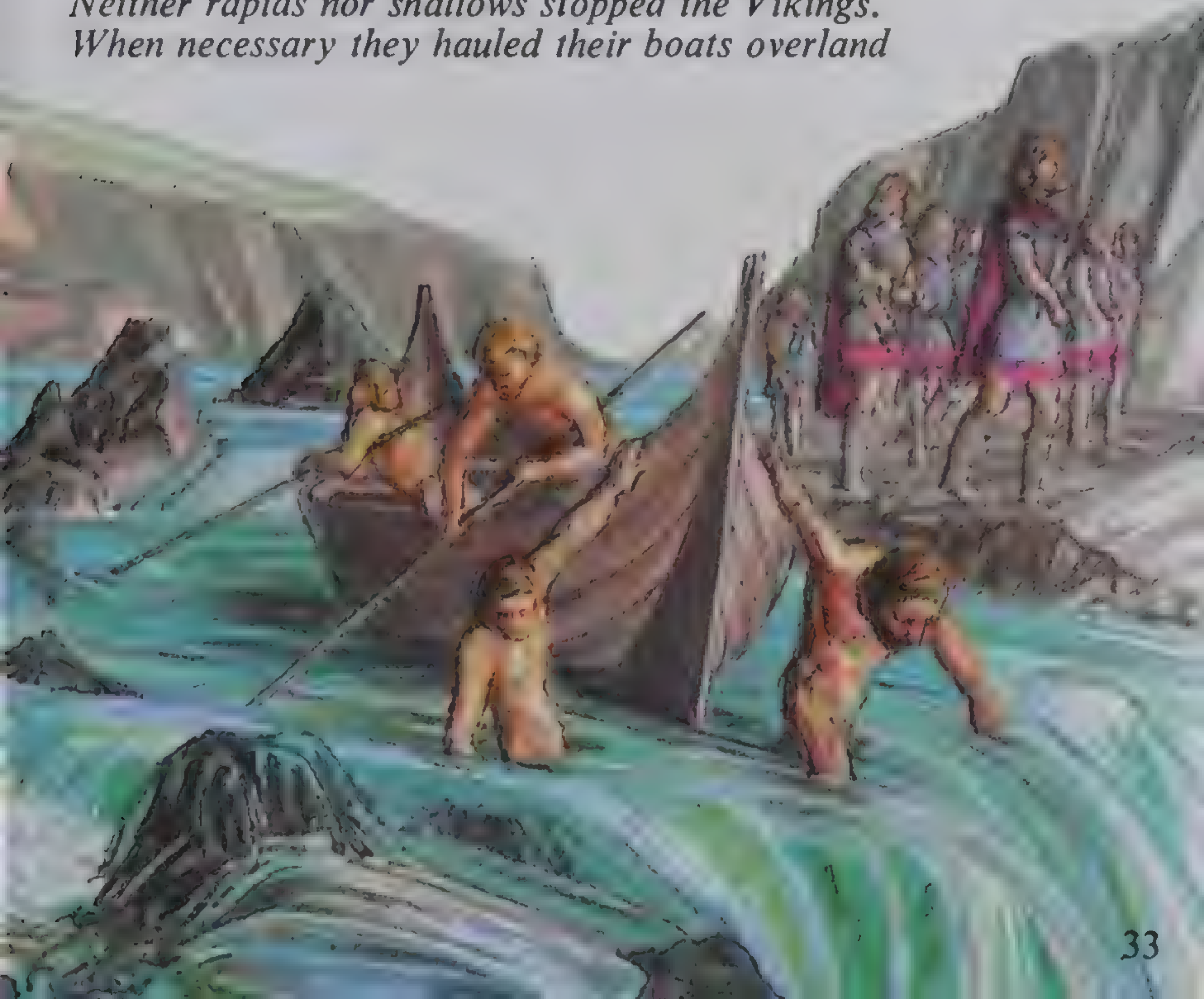
Iona, a small island in the Inner Hebrides, was attacked three times by the Vikings in the eleven years



between 795 A D and 806 A D. The monks there became so alarmed that they buried their treasure and left. When the Vikings came a fourth time in 825 A D, they found one monk living alone on Iona: when he refused to tell them where the treasure was buried, they killed him.

The same violent fate awaited the monks and churchmen in the rich abbeys of the Loire Valley in north-eastern France, for to their astonishment as well as to their horror, the Vikings steered their longships along the River Loire to reach them. Other Vikings navigated deep into France from the south, along the River Rhône. They also sailed down the Elbe and Rhine rivers to raid deep into the heart of Germany.

*Neither rapids nor shallows stopped the Vikings.  
When necessary they hauled their boats overland*





The Vikings were strong, determined people. When a river became too shallow for them to sail or row along, they hauled their boats overland until they found another river. In this way they reached Russia, which took its name from the Vikings, who were known there as the *Rus*. They even found their way to the Black Sea and attacked Constantinople.

*When the Vikings first attacked Constantinople, the Byzantine emperor Michael gave them tribute, and allowed them to enter his city to trade*





The Byzantine emperor who ruled Constantinople was so impressed by their valour that a corps of Viking Northmen was attached to the Byzantine army, to be used as the emperor's bodyguard and as shock troops in the field.





Although some people, like the Arabs in the Mediterranean or the Bulgars in eastern Europe, fought back hard and killed many attacking Vikings, most were completely helpless in the face of this terrible onslaught. As time went on and the Vikings returned year after year for more and more raiding, a lot of people came to the grim conclusion that God was angry with them and that their punishment was to suffer at the hands of the merciless, murderous raiders from the north. Before long, though, Europeans found there was another explanation for the Vikings' frequent visits. Certainly some of them were attracted to invade other lands by





the chances it gave them for rich booty and adventure. However, many more Vikings came because they were looking for new homes and new places in which to settle.

*In a sea battle off the coast of Spain, the Moors used a form of Greek fire (inflammable naphtha) to defeat the Vikings*









Scandinavia, as you know, was not an easy place to live in, and by the 9th century A D, the Vikings there were finding it more and more difficult to earn a proper living for themselves. Younger Vikings became particularly restless because Scandinavia was becoming overcrowded and good farming land was now very hard to find. So the Vikings began to look overseas, to countries like England, France, Germany and Russia: where, they decided, there was room for them to settle and establish farms.

The people who already lived in these overseas lands were not at all happy when the Vikings came to set up home among them. For instance, when Vikings from Norway came to the Orkney and Shetland Islands in the 9th century, the Irish and Pictish hermits who lived there fled: they had no desire at all to live with the 'robber Northmen', as they called them.

Nobody, it seemed, wanted to have the Vikings as neighbours, and no wonder, because Viking settlers were not very friendly. In fact, they were the exact opposite. In Russia, Ireland, northern France and England, they just moved in, took the lands they wanted and drove the owners away.

This is what happened to farmers in Northumberland and Mercia in 876 A D and 877 A D. In 878 A D, the writer of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* made the following record in his book. Danish Vikings, he wrote 'came stealthily to Chippenham and occupied the lands of the West Saxons . . . and drove a great part of the people over the sea and conquered most of the others.'

*As Viking settlers arrive, the hermits leave*



The Vikings were obviously determined to stay and they did not hesitate to wage war in order to do so. Some people, like King Alfred of Wessex (848-899 A D) in England or the Holy Roman Emperor Louis the Pious (778-840 A D) in Flanders, fought back and made great efforts to keep the Vikings at bay. Many others, though, tried to make the Vikings leave by paying them bribes. In England, where the area of Viking settlement was known as the Danelaw, the money the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants paid out was known as *Danegeld* (Dane's Money). With Danegeld tucked away in their purses, some Vikings *did* leave England, but they soon came back to collect more.

Some Vikings, though, refused to leave their new homes including many Vikings of the Danelaw.

In France, the situation was the same. In 845 A D, for instance, the Vikings besieged Paris, and the





Frankish King, Charles the Bald, gave them seven pounds of silver to stop their attack. The Vikings, of course, came back to France several times on raiding expeditions. However, some time before 911 A D, a Viking called Rollo brought his followers to settle in Normandy. Soon afterwards, Rollo and his Vikings became Christians and in 1066, their descendants, the Normans, invaded England and made it their kingdom.

*The Vikings besiege Paris*





By this time, Swedish Vikings had already made themselves rulers in Russia. There, in 862 A D, a Viking called Rurik became Prince of the northern region of Novgorod. In the first half of the 10th century, other Vikings were rulers in Kiev in the south. The Vikings in and around Kiev were called 'Rus' by the local population and that is how 'Russia' got its name.

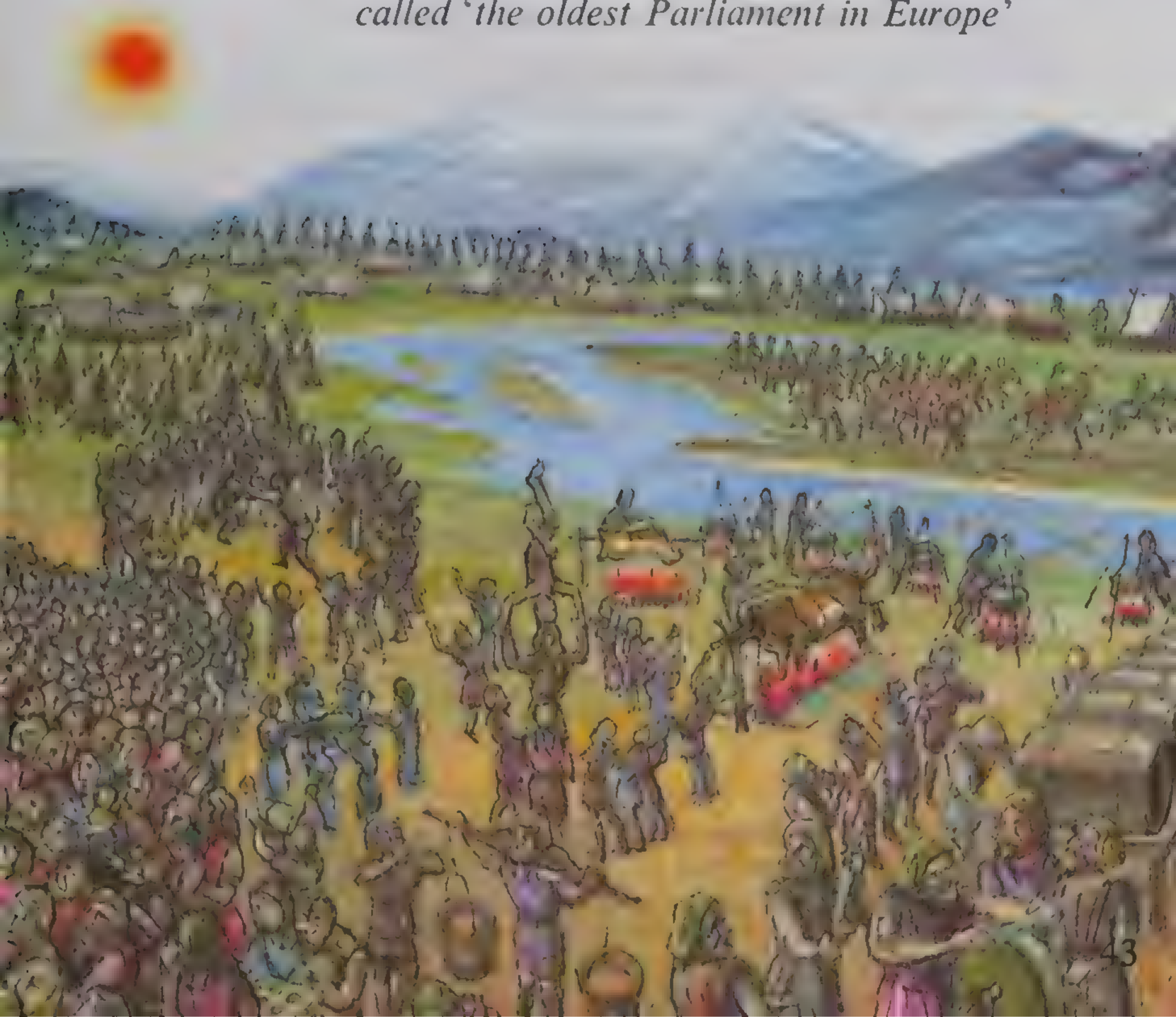
Vikings who left Scandinavia to settle in other lands did not go only to areas that were already inhabited by other peoples. They also set up home in places where Europeans had never lived before. One of these was Iceland, a small volcanic island just south of the Arctic Circle.





The first Viking to settle in Iceland was a Norwegian chieftain, Ingolfur Arnarson, in 874 A D. The Vikings soon found that living in Iceland was just as difficult as living in Scandinavia, because they had to search hard to find strips of fertile land where crops could be grown and cattle grazed. Despite these hardships and despite the cold, wet, windy climate, the Vikings settled down, set up farms, built boats and erected houses with board walls and turf roofs. Before long, more Vikings came out from Scandinavia. By 930 A D, when the Iceland Vikings held their first Althing, or general assembly, the island had 10,000 inhabitants.

*The Icelandic Althing, or general assembly, here taking place at Thingvellir (Parliament Plains). It was a yearly event, and has been called 'the oldest Parliament in Europe'*







About ten years later, though, Viking history began to repeat itself. In Iceland, as in Scandinavia, good farming land became scarce, food became short and some of the Iceland Vikings began to look further west for new homes. They found them in Greenland, which was explored in 982 A D by Erik the Red. Four years later, Erik left Iceland for Greenland with twenty five ships, full of settlers, but only fourteen ships reached Greenland safely. Within a few years, the Vikings had set up three hundred farms in Greenland, some with as many as twenty cows as well as sheep and goats, and Erik the Red had forty cows on his large farm at Brattahlid. The Vikings made plenty of butter and cheese to eat, and they found the hunting in Greenland was very good: there were caribou and bears and plenty of whales, seals and fish in the sea. Growing crops in Greenland





### *Hunting caribou*

was not so successful, but the trading ships that sailed regularly to Iceland and Norway brought back the bread and other things the Greenlanders needed.

Although they did not know it, the Vikings who settled first in the Orkneys and Shetlands, then in the Faroes, then in Iceland and Greenland, were moving slowly westwards across the north Atlantic. If you look at a map, you can see that these islands look like stepping stones across the ocean. The next important 'stone' after Greenland, though, is the vast continent of North America, and some historians believe that Viking expeditions could have sailed there from Greenland.



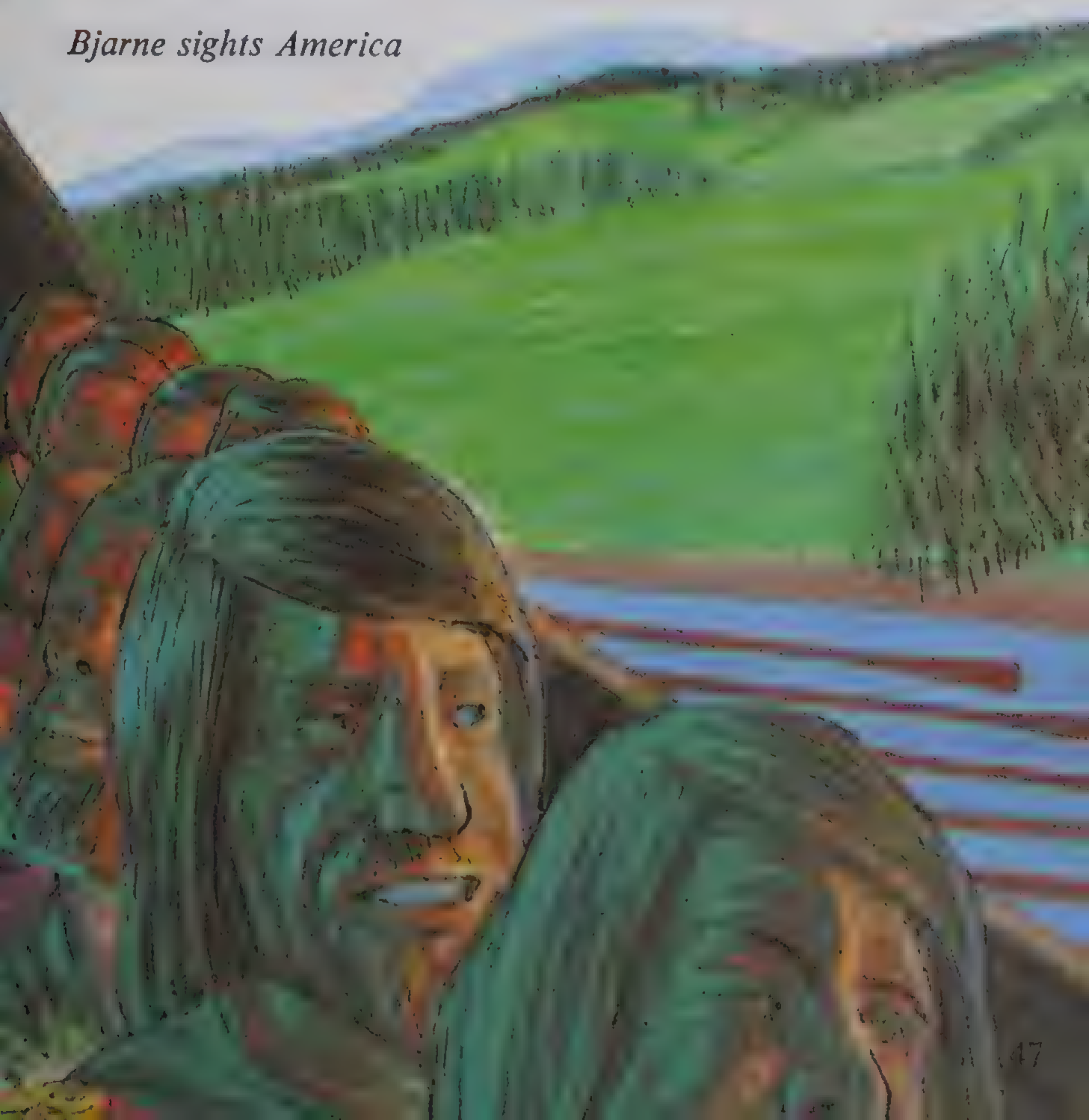
According to one of the Viking sagas, the *Greenland Saga*, Bjarne Hergulfsson discovered America by accident when he was blown off course on a voyage from Iceland to Greenland in 986 A.D. When he sighted the American coast, Bjarne was mystified. He had expected to see Greenland's great black mountains covered in masses of glittering ice. Instead he saw thick forests and tree-covered hills. What Bjarne may have discovered was the coast of Newfoundland or Labrador. After sailing along this coastline for some distance, Bjarne turned his longship eastwards and eventually reached Greenland.

About fifteen years later, again according to the Viking sagas, the Greenland Vikings became very interested in Bjarne's tree-covered land. The reason was



that they could not find enough timber in Greenland to build their houses and ships. So in 1002 A D, Leif Eriksson, the son of Erik the Red, set out to re-discover Bjarne's land and came ashore in the most beautiful country he had ever seen. It was like a paradise with its pleasant summer climate, rich grass, thick forests, rivers full of salmon and vines full of big juicy grapes. Leif called this country Vinland. When his expedition returned to Greenland the Vikings there naturally became enormously excited at the news and several of them wanted to leave Greenland and settle in Vinland.

### *Bjarne sights America*





The first Viking settlers, under their leader Thorfinn Karlsefni, sailed for Vinland in 1009 A.D. There were about two hundred of them, and at first, they were delighted with their new home. Soon, though, they discovered that Vinland was only a summer paradise. In winter the temperature dropped well below freezing point. The sea froze and fishing was impossible. Worse still, the Vikings found that the Skraelings who lived in Vinland were very unfriendly towards them. The Skraelings, who may have been

*Freydis saves the Vikings*





Eskimos or Red Indians, accepted the Vikings' gifts of milk and red cloth, but they soon began to make violent attacks on the newcomers. During one of these attacks a woman called Freydis saved her fellow Vikings from disaster by shrieking at the Skraelings in a high-pitched voice and waving a sword above her head. Fortunately, the Skraelings were so frightened by this that they jumped into their canoes and left.

However, the Vikings knew the Skraelings would come back so they returned to Greenland.

No one, of course, knows for certain that the Vikings really did go to America and set up a colony called Vinland. All the same, archaeologists have found Viking-type tools, spindles and anvils at a place in Newfoundland, where Vinland may have been.





By this time, though, the Vikings as such had largely disappeared. In all the lands they had settled, as well as in Scandinavia, they had mixed with other peoples and so they became Russians, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Italians, Swedes, Danes, Icelanders and Norwegians.

Nevertheless, like all great peoples of the past, the Vikings left evidence of their existence behind them. Archaeologists have found Viking ships, tools, jewellery, swords, shields, helmets and other things buried in the earth. Traces of the Vikings can also be found in modern European towns and even in the people who live in them. If you are tall, have blonde hair and blue eyes and live in eastern or north-eastern England, then you could be a descendant of the Vikings. The Vikings had names like Orme, Rosko or Roscoe, Knut or Nott, and Svein or Swain, so if this is your surname, then you, too, could have Viking ancestors.

Towns can also have names that come from Viking names. A town like Berwick may stand at a place where the Vikings established a settlement in a ‘-wick’, which means ‘creek’ or ‘bay’. The ending ‘-toft’, as in Lowes-toft, was Viking for ‘homestead’ and the ending ‘-by’ as in Ladby in Denmark meant ‘township’. Even London, which was called ‘Lundenvic’ by the Vikings, carries traces of its Viking history, because a ‘vik-place’ was a ‘trading place’ or ‘raiding place.’

So you can see that the Vikings of the past are still with us in many fascinating ways.

*At Lerwick in the Shetland Isles, a Viking ritual survives in Up Helly Aa, when a model of a longship is burned to mark the end of the dark nights of the Winter Solstice*







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